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RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BEIRUT 000903

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ELA
ALSO FOR IO A/S BRIMMER
P FOR DRUSSELL, RRANGASWAMY
PARIS FOR J MILLER
USUN FOR WOLFF/GERMAIN/SCHEDLBAUER
NSC FOR SHAPIRO, MCDERMOTT
DOD/OSD FOR FLOURNOY/KAHL/DALTON
DRL/NESA FOR WHITMAN, BARGHOUT
OVP FOR HMUSTAFA

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TAGS: [MOPS](#) [MCAP](#) [PTER](#) [UNSC](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [IS](#) [LE](#)
SUBJECT: UNIFIL'S FC GRAZIANO CALLS FOR STRONGER GOL
SUPPORT FOR LEBANON'S ARMED FORCES AND UNSCR 1701
IMPLEMENTATION

REF: A. A) BEIRUT 819
[1](#)B. B) USUN 750

Classified By: Ambassador Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d).

SUMMARY AND COMMENT

[1](#)1. (C) In an August 10 meeting with the Ambassador, United Nations Interim Force In Lebanon (UNIFIL) Force Commander General Claudio Graziano dismissed recent criticism of the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), emphasizing that it did not have the political "umbrella" to act decisively during last month's weapons cache explosion at Khirbet Selim. Without Israeli withdrawal from northern Ghajar and Sheba'a Farms, Hizballah's justification for maintaining its arms remains strong in the Lebanese psyche. Graziano, who believes that the LAF, with strong government support, could be the centerpiece for implementing United Nations Security Council Resolution 1701, emphasized the need to maintain strong support for the LAF despite its current weaknesses. He advised that civil-military cooperation is key to improving the image and effectiveness of the LAF in south Lebanon.

[1](#)2. (C) Graziano predicted that the proposed UN assessment of UNIFIL would take a year to complete, and he did not expect to see any changes to UNIFIL's rules of engagement or operational mandate. He demurred on enumerating any specific additional manpower or equipment needs, just as he had during his August 5 meeting at USUN.

[1](#)3. (C) As we think about our long-term commitment to the LAF and discuss ways to encourage the LAF to produce tangible deliverables from USG military assistance, we should consider assisting in expanding the LAF's CIMIC capability as a means to that end. End summary and comment.

LACK OF POLITICAL WILLPOWER
HAMSTRINGS THE LAF

[1](#)4. (C) Lack of GOL political will and leadership prevented the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) from acting more boldly when

a weapons cache exploded at Khirbet Selim on July 14 (ref A), complained General Claudio Graziano in a August 10 meeting with the Ambassador, DATT, and PolOff at UNIFIL HQ in Naqoura. Graziano, who was accompanied by Deputy Force Commander BG Apurba Bardalai and Senior UNIFIL Political Advisor Milos Strugar, relayed that LAF Commander General Jean Kahwaji had been ready to act at Khirbet Selim if given "political cover" to enforce a government decision; however, the absence of clear support from government leaders prevented the LAF from moving more aggressively to contain the situation. Although neither caretaker Prime Minister Fouad Siniora nor caretaker Defense Minister Elias Murr made statements supporting LAF action, Graziano credited Kahwaji for doing what he could at Khirbet Selim.

15. (C) Graziano pointed out that any action pertaining to the LAF and the GOL in the south requires Hizballah-allied Speaker Nabih Berri's approval. It was Berri who made an effort to reduce tensions after the Khirbet Selim explosion and during the Kfar Shouba Blue Line violations on July 18, he pointed out. For his part, Strugar advised not releasing the joint UNIFIL-LAF report on the Khirbet Selim incident until after the new Lebanese government is formed.

16. (C) The LAF has performed well in confrontations with terrorists and with regard to the Palestinian camps, Graziano assessed. He noted, though, that it was "reluctant" to take on Hizballah and thus LAF searches of Hizballah-held buildings "is not going to happen." A political vacuum, such as that from the 2005 the Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon in 2005 until 2008's Doha Accord, prevents the emergence a

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strong LAF, he observed. Graziano emphasized the need to maintain strong support for the LAF despite its perceived weaknesses.

CIVIL-MILITARY COOPERATION KEY
TO BUILDING LAF CREDIBILITY

17. (C) Graziano opined that the lack of a political solution to continued Israeli occupation of northern Ghajar and Sheba'a Farms leaves the LAF and UNIFIL as "caretakers" of an easily agitated populace in the south. The occupation also justifies Hizballah's arms in the eyes of local residents, Graziano said. In such an environment, the key to better implementation of UNSCR 1701 is "soft power" targeting the local population through better LAF integration into local society, Graziano believes. The LAF, with strong government support, could be the centerpiece for implementing UNSCR 1701 with the goodwill purchased by wider LAF involvement in social services and community relations programs. UNIFIL's civil-military cooperation (CIMIC) training of LAF officers is a step in this direction, but it should be expanded and better funded, Graziano urged. Thus far, the GOL's failure to invest in the south has left it with no authority to impose its political will. To remedy this situation, donor countries and the GOL should channel project funding through the LAF for the south's mostly Shia population to build the LAF's reputation as a concerned and competent institution like Hizballah. While UNIFIL can never, as a foreign force, compete with Hizballah for the people's trust in the south, the LAF can, Graziano affirmed. (Note: To date, UNIFIL has trained 13 LAF personnel in CIMIC skills and plans to undertake two more courses of the same size by year end. UNIFIL is also still developing a Military Community Outreach (MCO) course. End note).

18. (C) Strugar noted that UNIFIL-sponsored opinion polls conducted by Information International in the UNIFIL area of operation indicate a "firm trend" of support for both the LAF and Hizballah as legitimate security forces. Funding for the polling came from the U.K. and Norway, and more such support is needed, Strugar believes.

¶9. (C) Graziano lauded the work of LAF General Abdul Chehaytli as a leader in the tripartite talks with the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF). He commended Chehaytli as the "only one working" to make progress in the talks and suggested him as an advisor to PM-designate Saad Hariri in the new government. Graziano remarked that he has never met Hariri, but recommended that Hariri recruit a strong military affairs advisor to develop his understanding of the critical role that UNIFIL plays in th south.

GRAZIANO WELCOMES STRONG
LANGUAGE ON 101 IMPLEMENTATION

¶10. (C) Graziano calculated that the recently announced UN assessment of UNIFIL structures and capacities could take up to a year to complete. Although he believes that U.K. budget concerns were one impetus for the assessment, it could actually result in increases to the July 2010 budget, he said. Strugar downplayed the possibility of changes to UNIFIL's rules of engagement as part of the renewal of UNIFIL's mandate on August 31, but he added that searches would still be coordinated with the LAF and praised the usefulness of LAF intelligence. Graziano expressed hope for the strongest possible language on implementing UNSCR 1701 in the mandate renewal, but he demurred on enumerating any specific additional manpower or equipment needs, just as he had during his August 5 meeting at USUN (ref B).

COMMENT

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¶11. (C) Graziano was convinced that strengthening the LAF's CIMIC skills is the best way to build its reputation and effectiveness vis-a-vis Hizballah. As we think about our long-term commitment to the LAF and discuss ways to encourage the LAF to produce tangible deliverables from USG military assistance, we should consider assisting in expanding the LAF's CIMIC capability as a means to that end. Channeling projects in south Lebanon-- such as roadbuilding --via the LAF could be a tool to convince residents that the LAF is an effective organization that cares about their well-being, as well as their security. End comment.
SISON